

Lingle still upbeat halfway through first term

By RON STATON

The Associated Press

HONOLULU — After two years of dealing with a sometimes hostile Democrat-controlled Legislature, Hawaii's first Republican governor in 40 years remains upbeat and optimistic.

"I'm optimistic every day I wake up," said Gov. Linda Lingle. "The more I learn, the more excited I am because I think my ability to achieve things for the public is enhanced."

"It's been a great two years," Lingle said in an interview with The Associated Press in her office on Monday in advance of Thursday's second anniversary of becoming Hawaii's first woman governor.

Lingle said she has no regrets, and says it has been a privilege to serve as Hawaii's governor. "The public has treated me so well," she said.

"We came in with a very focused set of goals," with a priority on restoring trust and integrity in government, expanding and diversifying the economy, and improving public education, she said.

"We've had a lot of successes,"



GOV. LINDA LINGLE

"It's been a great two years"

she said, outlining her list of the top 25 accomplishments of her administration during the first half of its first term.

The only reference to education was that her administration made improving public education a statewide priority among legislators, educators and the community.

Lingle fought unsuccessfully to break up the state Board of Education into smaller district boards.

The Legislature resisted her efforts to let the public vote on a proposed constitutional amendment that would have created seven locally elected school boards.

"It is disappointing that the Legislature would not trust the public enough to decide on an issue the public really cared about," she said.

Neighbor Island people particularly felt the issue was important, and Lingle said some Neighbor Is-

land legislators could bring up local school boards again during the 2005 session.

Lingle said she plans to focus her education efforts on early-childhood education, charter schools and the University of Hawaii.

Lingle said she has a "high level of confidence" in UH interim President David McClain and the Board of Regents, saying they are focused on moving the university

GOV. LINGLE LISTS HER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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A glance at some of the top accomplishments listed by Gov. Linda Lingle for the first two years of her administration:

- Revised the no-bid contract selection process and opened the judicial selection process by making nominees' names public before final selection.
- Decreased the cost of doing business in Hawaii and made it more convenient to do business in the state.
- Expanded the economy by adding 28,500 new jobs in December 2002 and keeping unemployment below the national average.

- Improved public education by making it a statewide priority among legislators, educators and the community.
- Addressed prison overcrowding and protected victims of crime.
- Improved state parks and facilities.
- Promoted renewable energy and energy efficiency.
- Focused statewide attention on affordable housing and homelessness.
- Improved Hawaii State Hospital.
- Improved transportation.
- Fulfilled obligations to Native Hawaiians.

— Source: Gov. Linda Lingle

forward. The governor wasn't ready to discuss any specific legislative proposals for UH, but said a greater part of the state budget needs to be spent on the university, which also needs more autonomy.

Lingle is confident she will be able to work with the Legislature even though Democrats gained five seats in the House in the Nov. 2 elections, giving them a 41-10 advantage.

"No one has more experience at

this than I do," said the former Maui mayor. "I was a mayor for eight years with a council that was elected on a partisan basis, and the most Republicans (on the nine-member council) was three.

"I am used to having only a few people of my party in the legislative branch but still having a long record of being able to achieve good things for the community," she said.

Lingle also said the experience that she and her Cabinet members have gained over the past two years has given them a greater ability to achieve results.

The public expects the governor and Legislature to work together, she said.

"The public is not much interested in the inside-the-Capitol maneuvering that may go on," she said. "They just want results. The Legislature knows this and I do too."

On a practical level, Lingle also noted that many changes can be effected without legislation, and said she can accomplish much by changing administrative rules and policy.

Lingle said she doesn't anticipate any changes in her Cabinet for the second half of her first term.